

C O N F I D E N T I A L

LISBON 00070

SIPDIS

CXLISBON:

ACTION: POL/EC

INFO: AMB/DCM ORA DAO OPA

DISSEMINATION: POL

CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: CDA:DBALLARD

DRAFTED: POL/ECON:TFITRELL

CLEARED: PE:MHARRINGTON

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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 000070

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2018

TAGS: PGOV PO

SUBJECT: TREATY OF LISBON: PORTUGAL TO AVOID REFERENDUM

Classified By: POL CHIEF TROY FITRELL, REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (U) Portuguese Prime Minister Socrates confirmed in the National Assembly January 9 that he will not submit the EU reform treaty (the "Treaty of Lisbon") to a national referendum. Instead, he will send it to the National Assembly for parliamentary ratification.

¶2. (U) Socrates' governing Socialist Party (PS) and the principal opposition Social Democratic Party (PSD) each announced support for the parliamentary ratification process.

Together, the two parties represent 196 members of the 230 member body, enough to pass any legislation on which the two blocs can agree.

¶3. (U) Opposition to the parliamentary ratification process includes the Christian Democrat/Popular Party (CDS/PP; 12 members), a center-right party with a tradition of favoring referenda on contentious issues. In addition, the Communist Party (PCP; 11 members) and the Left Bloc (BE; 8 members) which represent Portugal's extreme left and oppose European integration in general, roundly criticized the government's decision not to proceed with a referendum. The Left Bloc has threatened to introduce a motion censuring the government.

Comment

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¶4. (C) Some pundits and politicians criticized the Prime Minister for this decision, given that a referendum on a potential European constitution was a PS campaign platform in the 2005 election that put Socrates in office. Socrates maintained that the constitution text the PS had pledged to submit to a referendum was rendered irrelevant by the French and Dutch votes in 2005, and that the Treaty of Lisbon is a different document. Many informed observers have dismissed that argument as a weak rationalization, since the two texts are so similar. We do not, however, believe the decision will have serious domestic political consequences for Socrates or the PS, since the issue has little resonance for most Portuguese, and since the leader of the PSD, Luis Filipe Menezes, also supports ratification by the National Assembly.

¶5. (C) A senior PS legislator told pol/econ counselor that PM Socrates's decision was driven primarily by external factors. The government had little reason to fear the

results of a referendum, he said. Seventy percent of those casting votes in a referendum would vote yes, he estimated, although turnout would be low given that most Portuguese care little about the issue. The main reason the Prime Minister opted for parliamentary ratification is to avoid putting other European governments in a bind by setting a precedent.

UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown in particular, he said, was in a "fragile situation." Our contact acknowledged that Socrates had been urged by other European leaders not to hold a referendum.

Ballard